

The Washington Post _____
The New York Times _____
The Washington Times _____
The Wall Street Journal _____
The Christian Science Monitor _____
New York Daily News _____
USA Today _____
The Chicago Tribune _____
Rocky Mt. News (Co)
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Top spook calling it quits

THE ISSUE:
Webster retiring from CIA

OUR VIEW:
A job well done

William Webster can claim an accomplishment that is becoming notable in this age of prosecutorial confirmation hearings and a scandal-mongering press: After 13 years in high office in Washington, he is retiring as CIA director amid deserved bipartisan praise.

A former U.S. attorney and federal appellate judge in St. Louis, Webster was chosen by Democratic President Jimmy Carter to head the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1978 even though he was a Republican. The judge's knowledge of law and reputation for rectitude brought the FBI renewed credibility in what were still the post-Watergate years.

President Reagan kept Webster on at the bureau until another scandal created greater need elsewhere. Central Intelligence Agency director William Casey died in 1987. Reagan's first nominee to replace him, CIA deputy director Robert Gates, was attacked as tainted by the agency's alleged

role in the Iran-Contra affair; Gates withdrew his name under fire.

Reagan turned to straight-arrow Webster, who easily won confirmation from the Senate. Again Webster performed the function of restoring peace and morale to a sensitive agency. He managed the CIA successfully during the historic periods of communism's fall and of the Gulf war.

President Bush must now find a successor of equal integrity — and, ideally, greater experience in foreign affairs. The CIA's mission will be redefined in coming years, as the Soviet threat recedes and problems of arms-treaty verification, nuclear proliferation in the Third World, terrorism and drug trafficking move to the fore.

Gates, now deputy national security adviser, is widely mentioned as a possible nominee and is well qualified. But Bush may prefer to avoid a potentially bitter repeat of the confirmation controversy of 1987.

Gates might be less lucky than William Webster, who seems to have emerged from long years of faithful public service bearing few political scars.